

At A Glance: WIC Participation and Breastfeeding in South Carolina, 2009-2010 PRAMS Data

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March 2013

Socioeconomic status (SES) is known to be associated with breastfeeding initiation and duration. The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a program for pregnant women, postpartum women, and children living in low-income families (<185% of the Federal Poverty Level) that provides education and support to improve nutrition. Although WIC education and services have been improved to encourage breastfeeding over the years, gaps in breastfeeding initiation still exist between WIC and non-WIC participants. To date, a few studies tried to tease out whether the lower breastfeeding initiation rate has more to do with the nature of the WIC program or the fact that WIC participants are from low SES households. They have done this by comparing breastfeeding initiation among WIC participants to income-eligible non-WIC participants. These studies have used different data sources and their findings have been inconsistent. In this study, we aim to evaluate the role of WIC participation and income in breastfeeding initiation in South Carolina.

Figure 1. Percent of women initiating breastfeeding by race/ethnicity and WIC status, SC PRAMS 2009-2010

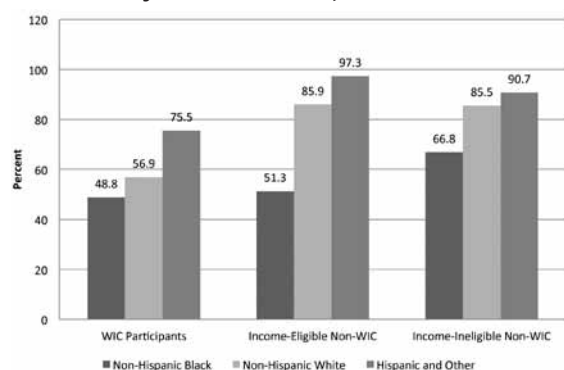
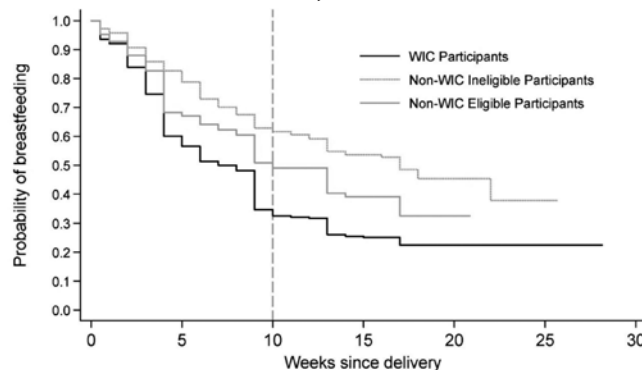


Figure 2. Probability of breastfeeding by postpartum week and WIC status, SC PRAMS 2009-2010



Methods

The data from the 2009-2010 South Carolina Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS) were used to examine breastfeeding initiation and duration. WIC participation was classified as follows: WIC participants, income-eligible non-WIC participants, and income-ineligible non-WIC participants. A woman was classified as an income-eligible non-WIC participant if she was not a WIC participant and reported that she lived in a household whose income and number of people depending on that income placed her at <185% of the Federal Poverty Level. Logistic regression models were used to analyze the association between breastfeeding initiation and WIC participation. The Kaplan-Meier life table method and Cox proportional hazards model were used to determine whether the probabilities of breastfeeding and hazards of discontinuing breastfeeding differed by WIC participation groups.

Key Facts

- In South Carolina, the overall rate of breastfeeding initiation was 67.2% which is below the Healthy People 2010 goal (75%).
- Both income-ineligible non-WIC participants (84.0%) and income-eligible non-WIC participants (78.9%) had higher rates of breastfeeding initiation than WIC participants (55.5%).
- Income-eligible non-WIC participants had higher rates of breastfeeding initiation than WIC participants for all race/ethnicity categories (Figure 1); however, the difference was much smaller among non-Hispanic black women.
- After adjusting for factors including mother's race, age, pregnancy intendedness, and prenatal care utilization, both

income-ineligible and income-eligible non-WIC participants were still more than twice as likely to initiate breastfeeding compared to WIC participants.

- Though there were differences in breastfeeding duration by WIC status (Figure 2), these differences were not statistically significant after adjusting for factors including as mother's race, age, pregnancy intendedness, and prenatal care utilization.

Conclusion

Based on the most recent SC data, this study confirmed WIC participants were less likely to initiate breastfeeding. However, being from a low income family may not alone explain the differences in breastfeeding initiation between WIC and non-WIC participants, especially among non-Hispanic white women. A potential explanation is that a combination of living in a low-income family and having access to a free or inexpensive source of formula (through WIC) may lead to the lower breastfeeding initiation rate among WIC participants. However, it is important to note that these results also indicate that, though WIC participation may adversely affect breastfeeding initiation, WIC participants do not have significantly shorter breastfeeding durations than their non-WIC counterparts (both WIC eligible and non-eligible). Future studies are needed to better understand income-eligible non-WIC participants and the effect of factors related to WIC participation.



Data Source:
Pregnancy Risk Assessment
Monitoring System
S.C. Department of Health and
Environmental Control
www.scdhec.gov CR-010661 3/13